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"Wright-Patterson Air Force Base: Ohio's Economic Opportunity" Speech

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WPAFB - OHIO'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Ask the average area citizen how Wright-Patterson Air Force Base benefits our community and he or she will have a vague notion that the Base provides jobs and contributes a substantial amount of dollars into our local economy. Ask one of the seven hundred members of the Miami Valley Military Affairs Association or a member of the American Defense Preparedness Association and you will hear of the high quality of individual which the Air Force brings to our community who support community functions; the annual three billion dollars of payroll impact, and the 29,000 jobs provided by that facility.

Prior to our recent legislative visit, if you were to ask anyone in Columbus about Wright-Patt, they most likely would allude to air craft flying activities. Alas, the ignorance of the Ohio government as to the phenomenal economic opportunity available to Ohio from service to Wright-Patterson and exploiting its benefits, is tragic for Ohio citizens and taxpayers.

A handful of local business leaders have worked hard for many years in support of the facilities at Wright-Patt. They make annual pilgrimages to Washington to maintain support for that facility. The neglect is not theirs...it is of the State Government and our educational system.

Clearly, the command staff has numerous highly trained and experienced executive managers, who could enjoy a far greater personal benefit in private industry. We are fortunate that they are patriots. While practices over the years have created environmental problems on the Base, current management is fully dedicated to seek solutions to such problems and work with the community and the State accordingly.

Thanks to command policies, Miami Valley has been the beneficiary of several hundred highly technical companies locating in this area, hiring hundreds of highly paid individuals.

What are the benefits of responding to the needs of the Base? The answer is jobs, thousands of highly paid potential jobs in private industry, exploiting the research and products developed because of the research conducted and financed at WPAFB. Equally important are the thousands of other jobs that will be created in machine shops, food service, construction and other trades.

During the recent Ohio legislative visit, AFLC Commander General Hansen pointed out the exploding need for individuals trained in computer science due to the advancing technology in Air Force projects. This and other problems of acquiring qualified personnel point up the desperate need for the Ohio educational system to identify the type of training individuals require to fill the Air Force job opportunities and to turn out the properly trained individuals to fill those jobs as well as the technical jobs available at the hundreds of high-tech companies serving Wright-Patterson.

How do we exploit benefits at Wright-Patterson? One example of the many research projects sponsored by the Air Force is a ten million dollar Artificial Intelligence Grant Award to a consortium of Ohio-based universities. This offers an opportunity for a private sector funded component of such research activities to build on the knowledge learned from the military program to advance a new generation of computer science technology in private sector application. Working symbiotically, both the military and the private sector benefit in excess of their investments. The aggregation of such personnel dealing with the technology of the future, and establishment of appropriate university-based expertise

could well enable Ohio to be a world leader in computer science application technology.

This is quite similar to the support of Wright-Patterson and the Air Force Materials Lab of the recently funded Edison Materials Research Technology Center at Research Park.

There are literally dozens of such research programs ongoing at WPAFB requiring highly trained scientists, dealing with technology of the future and offering private sector application, products and jobs. The proper exploitation of research and development funded at this unique facility could propel Ohio to the forefront in world class technology initiatives.

Surely, there can be improvements in such areas as better utilization of the services of small businesses. The Commanders know that small businesses offer better quality and prices in many areas, but the procurement regulations are formidable for small businesses. We need to solve this problem.

Chancellor William Coulter of the Ohio Board of Regents and his deputies have made several visits to learn of Wright-Patterson activities in the past few weeks. He recognizes the tremendous opportunities which exist for Ohio because of Wright-Patterson and the Air Force Institute of Technology being located here, as well as the need for an educational plan.

Ohio is investing hundreds of millions of dollars in incentive programs such as job training, research grants, low interest loans, and many other programs perceived to assist business growth and jobs. There is no plan to identify opportunities for job creation at facilities such as Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. There should be. If

Ohio is to continue to keep Wright-Patterson together and enjoy its benefits, there must be.

It is our responsibility in the Dayton area to conceive such a plan, to make the benefits known to the entire State of Ohio, and to cause the State of Ohio to adopt a plan accordingly. The recent legislative visit was an introduction to that initiative.

Unlike other states who recognize the benefits of such facilities with far less potential than WPAFB, and develop elaborate programs to serve and enhance them, the State of Ohio has demonstrated a hands-off cavalier relationship with Wright-Patterson.

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base anchors one of the greatest, if not the greatest, aggregation of scientific and research personnel in the world. With other states recognizing the benefits of such a plum as WPAFB, and continually trying to seal away parts of this facility, there is urgency to our call to action.

Charles F. Horn
Dayton, Ohio
Senator, Sixth District
July 22, 1988